

Garrison W. L.

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Esteemed Friend:

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The names of a number of well known friends of universal reform are to be appended to this printed call for a convention. Should you feel so disposed, it would gratify them to see yours added to the number. Please read the call critically, and if you are willing to sign it, a line to that effect from you would be very acceptable.

Truly yours,

Wm. Lloyd Garrison.

Theodore Parker.

ANTI-SABBATH CONVENTION.

TO THE FRIENDS OF CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY.

The right of every man to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience is inherent, inalienable, self-evident. Yet it is notorious, that, in all the States, excepting Louisiana, there are laws enforcing the religious observance of the FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK AS THE SABBATH, and punishing as criminals such as attempt to pursue their usual avocations on that day,—avocations which even Sabbatharians recognise as innocent and laudable on all other days. It is true, some exceptions are made to the rigorous operation of these laws, in favor of the Seventh Day Baptists, Jews, and others who keep the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath; but this freedom is granted in condescension to the scruples of particular sects, as a privilege, and not recognised as a natural right. For those, (and the number is large, and steadily increasing,) who believe that the Sabbath was exclusively a Jewish institution,—“a shadow of good things to come,” which vanished eighteen hundred years ago before the light of the Christian dispensation, and therefore that it constitutes no part of Christianity,—*there is no exemption from the penalty of the law;* but, should they venture to labor even for bread on that day, or be guilty of what is called “Sabbath desecration,” they are liable either to fine or imprisonment! Cases of this kind have occurred in Massachusetts, Vermont, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, within a comparatively short period, where conscientious and upright persons have been thrust into prison, for an act no more intrinsically heinous than that of gathering in a crop of hay, or selling moral and philanthropic publications. There is, therefore, no liberty of conscience allowed to the people of this country, *under the laws thereof, in regard to the observance or non-observance of the first day of the week as a holy day.* *of a Sabbath day.*

In addition to these startling facts, within the last five years a religious combination has been formed in this land, styling itself “THE AMERICAN FOREIGN SABBATH UNION,” whose specific object it is to impose the Sabbatical yoke yet more heavily on the necks of the American people. In a recent appeal made for pecuniary assistance by the Executive Committee of that Union, it is stated that “the Secretary (Rev. Dr. Edwards) has visited twenty of the United States, and travelled more than thirty thousand miles, addressing public bodies of all descriptions, and presenting reasons why, as a nation, we should keep the Sabbath—all secular business, travelling and amusement be confined to six days in a week—and all people assemble on the Sabbath, and worship God.” A “permanent (?) Sabbath document” has been prepared by the Secretary; and “what has already been done will put a copy of this document into more than three hundred thousand families.” Still greater efforts are to be made by the “Union” for the furtherance of its object.

That this combination is animated by the spirit of religious bigotry and ecclesiastical tyranny—the spirit which banished the Baptists from Massachusetts, and subjected the Quakers to imprisonment and death, in the early settlement of this country—admits of little doubt. It is managed and sustained by those, who have secured the enactment of the penal laws against Sabbath-breaking, (all that the spirit of the times will allow,) and whose disposition it manifestly is, if they can increase their power, to obtain the passage of yet more stringent laws against those who do not “esteem one day above another,” but esteem “every day”—who are not willing that any man shall judge them “in respect of a holy day, or the new moon, or the Sabbath”—and who mean to “stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free, and not to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” Its supporters do not rely solely upon reason, argument, persuasion, but also upon brute force—upon penal law; and thus, in seeking to crush by violence the rights of conscience, and religious liberty and equality, their real spirit is revealed as at war with the genius of republicanism, and the spirit of Christianity.

Believing that the efforts of this “Sabbath Union” ought to be baffled by at least a corresponding energy on the part of the friends of civil and religious liberty—

That the Sabbath, according to the Jewish Scriptures, was given to “the children of Israel,”—AND TO NO OTHER PEOPLE,—as “a sign” between them and God, and terminated, with all the other Mosaic rituals belonging to the “ministration of death, WRITTEN AND ENGRAVEN IN STONES,” on the introduction of “THE MINISTRATION OF THE SPIRIT,” and the substitution of “A BETTER COVENANT, which was established upon better promises”;—

That Christianity knows nothing of a holy day, but only of a holy life,—the possession of a spirit which works no ill to any one, and is “THE FULFILLING OF THE LAW”;—

That the worship of God does not pertain to any particular day—is not a special, isolated performance—and cannot “come by observation”—but is purely spiritual in its nature, and comprehended in a cheerful obedience to the will of the Father, as far as it is made known;—

That the distinction made between sacred and secular acts, by the advocates of Sabbath keeping,—the sacred being the strict performance of religious observances, and the secular such as undoing heavy burdens, letting the oppressed go free, reclaiming the drunkard, laboring in the field or in the workshop, public travelling, transporting the United States mail,—is a distinction not based upon reason or Christianity, but calculated to lower the tone of individual and of public morality, and to depress the immutable standard of moral obligation;—

That the Sabbath, as now recognized and enforced, is one of the main pillars of Priestcraft and Superstition, and the strong-hold of a merely ceremonial Religion;—

That, in the hands of a Sabbatizing clergy, it is a mighty obstacle in the way of all the reforms of the age, — such as Anti-Slavery, Peace, Temperance, Purity, Human Brotherhood, &c. &c., — and rendered adamant in its aspect towards bleeding Humanity, whose cause must not be pleaded and whose cries must be stifled on its “sacred” occurrence; — and believing, especially,

That all penal laws respecting the religious observance of any day as the Sabbath are despotic and anti-Christian, and ought to be immediately abrogated; —

That the interference of the State, in matters of religious faith and outward observances, is not only unwarrantable, but a usurpation not to be tolerated; —

That they who are for subjecting to pains and penalties, all who do not construe the Scriptures in their light, in regard to a religious observance, are actuated by a mistaken or malevolent spirit, which is utterly at variance with the spirit of Christ, which in various ages has resorted to the dungeon, the rack, the gallows, and the stake, for the accomplishment of its purpose, and which ought to be boldly confronted and rebuked; —

We, the undersigned, therefore, invite all those who agree with us essentially in these views of the Sabbath question, to meet IN CONVENTION, in the city of Boston, on THURSDAY and FRIDAY, the 3d and 4th days of March next, to confer together, and to decide upon such measures for the dissemination of light and knowledge, on this subject, as may be deemed expedient.

In publishing this call for an ANTI-SABBATH CONVENTION, we desire to be clearly understood. We have no objection either to the first or the seventh day of the week as a day of rest from bodily toil, both for man and beast. On the contrary, *such rest is not only desirable, but indispensable.* Neither man nor beast can long endure unmitigated labor. But we do not believe that it is in harmony with the will of God, or the physical nature of man, that mankind should be doomed to hard and wasting toil six days out of seven, to obtain a bare subsistence. Reduced to such a pitiable condition, the rest of one day in the week is indeed grateful, and must be regarded as a blessing; but it is totally inadequate wholly to repair the physical injury or the moral degradation consequent on such protracted labor. It is not in accordance with the law of life, that our race should be thus worked, and only thus partially relieved from suffering and a premature death. *They need more, and must have more, instead of less rest;* and it is only for them to be enlightened and reclaimed — to put away those things which now cause them to grind in the prison-house of Toil, namely, idolatry, priestcraft, sectarianism, war, slavery, intemperance, licentiousness, monopoly, and the like — in short, to live in PEACE, obey the eternal law of being, strive for each other's welfare, and “glorify God in their bodies and spirits which are his” — and they will secure the rest, not merely of one day in seven, but of a very large portion of their earthly existence. To them shall be granted the mastery over every day and every hour of time, as against want and affliction; for the earth shall be filled with abundance for all.

Nor do we deny the right of any number of persons to observe a particular day of the week as holy time, by such religious rites and ceremonies as they may deem acceptable to God. To their own master, they stand or fall. In regard to all such matters, it is for every one to be fully persuaded in his own mind, and to obey the promptings of his own conscience; conceding to others the liberty he claims for himself.

The sole and distinct issue that we make is this: — We maintain that the seventh day Sabbath was exclusively Jewish in its origin and design; that no holiness, in any sense, attaches to the first day of the week, or to any other; and that the attempt to enforce the observance of any day as “THE SABBATH,” especially by penal enactments, is unauthorized by Scripture or reason, and a shameful act of imposture and tyranny. We claim for ourselves, and for all mankind, the right to worship God according to the dictates of OUR OWN CONSCIENCES. This right, inherent and inalienable, is cloven down in the United States, and we call upon all who desire to preserve civil and religious liberty to rally for its rescue.

By that infallible test of conscious rectitude which Jesus gave to his disciples, — “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them,” — let those who Sabbatize on the first day of the week be measured. At present, they constitute the majority, we the minority, in this country; — hence, the legislative power is in their hands, which they do not scruple to use for the purpose of binding and coercing our consciences. Now let the case be reversed. Suppose this power were in the hands of those who do not Sabbatize, and they should proceed to enact penal laws, forbidding the observance of any day as the Sabbath — would not the Sabbatarians cry out against such laws as vexatious and tyrannical, destructive of the rights of conscience, and a disgrace to the Statute book?

We are aware that we shall inevitably be accused, by the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees of the present time, as was Jesus by the same class in his age, as “not of God,” because we “do not keep the Sabbath day;” but we are persuaded, that to expose the popular delusion which prevails on this subject, is to advance the cause of a pure Christianity, to promote true and acceptable worship, and to inculcate strict moral and religious accountability in all the concerns of life, ON ALL DAYS OF THE WEEK ALIKE. If we are “infidels” or “heretics” for this belief, we are content to stand in the same condemnation, on this point, with TYNDALE, LUTHER, CALVIN, MELANCTHON, ROGER WILLIAMS, JOHN MILTON, PENN, FOX, PRIESTLY, BELSHAM, PALEY, WHITEY, Archbishop WHATELEY, and a host of others, who are everywhere lauded by the various sects with which they are identified as among the brightest ornaments of the Christian Church, and who are essentially agreed with us in the opinion, that the Sabbath was A JEWISH INSTITUTION.

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